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AUTHOR Kleinfeld, Judith; Shinkwin, Anne

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ABSTRACT

This paper on a widespread nonformal American educational experience, the Boy Scouts, describes the close relationship between family socialization and scouting, and the education that occurs in three key scouting settings: camp-outs, troop meetings, and scout service projects. The paper argues that certain types of families deliberately use scouting as an educational tool, as a way to reinforce threatened family values, and to carry out a specific educational agenda for their sons. The study is based on intensive observation of boys' experience in 2 Alaska scout troops, each observed for 7 months, and on repeated interviews with 20 "focal" boys (boys in troop leadership roles, with several years of scouting experience; boys new to the troops who noticed the commonplace) and their parents. Scouting education in the troop setting is seen as demanding that 11- and 12-year-old boys learn how to perform a difficult set of unfamiliar tasks: running a meeting, keeping a group together to get a job done, identifying community projects, and organizing volunteers. An analysis of these tasks as nonformal educational experiences is included. Positive reviews from scouting professionals, scoutmasters of the troops studied, and parents interested in the research are cited. (MH)

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MAKING GOOD BOYS BETTER:

NONFORMAL EDUCATION IN BOY SCOUTS

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by

Judith Kleinfeld
Professor of Psychology
Institute of Social and Economic Research
University of Alaska
Fairbanks, AK 99701

and

Anne Shinkwin
Associate Professor of Anthropology
University of Alaska
Fairbanks, AK 99701

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ABSTRACT

Parents and particularly middle class parents are anxious to see their children acquire the skills that they recognize are essential for success in American society—how to influence other people, how to work within organizational structures and roles, how to organize one's self and others to achieve goals, and so on. Parents quite deliberately seek for their children experiences outside school—youth groups and church groups, clubs and camps, Little League and other sports programs, that promise not only fun and friends but also develop "character," "leadership," and similar qualities.

For professional educators, however, this area of "nonformal education" is an uncharted domain. Educators lack concrete descriptions of what children do in these settings let alone analyses of the relationship of such settings to family socialization or the development of problem-solving and organizational skills.

This paper describes a widespread American educational experience--Boy Scouts--that has curiously gone unexamined. This study, to our knowledge, is the first that has examined in detail boys' actual day-to-day experience in the scout program and its educational effects.

This paper has two parts. First, we describe the close relationship between family socialization and scouting. We argue that certain types of families deliberately use scouts as an educational tool, as a way to reinforce threatened family values and to carry out a specific educational agenda they have for their sons.

Second, we describe the education that occurs in three key scouting

settings: camp-outs, troop meetings, and scout service projects. We argue that scouts demands eleven and twelve year old boys learn how to perform a difficult set of unfamiliar tasks--running a meeting, keeping a group together and getting a job done, identifying community projects and organizing volunteers.

Finally, we explore the notion of the "tasks" demanded in a setting as a conceptual framework for examining the effects of different forms of nonformal education.

We have all heard such phrases as the "school of hard knocks," "street university," and "common sense academy." They express a widely held belief: Much that is important to success in life and to a life that is a success is learned outside of school.

Parents and particularly middle class parents are anxious to see their children acquire the skills that they recognize are essential for success in American society—how to influence other people, how to work within organizational structures and roles, how to organize one's self and others to achieve goals, and so on. Parents deliberately seek for their children experiences outside school—youth groups and church groups, clubs and camps, Little League, soccer, and other sports, that promise not only fun and friends but also to develop "character," "leadership," and similar qualities.

Professional educators, however, know very little about the effects of these activities. Only recently have educators even defined the domain: "Nonformal education" is "organized, systematic teaching carried on outside of the formal, usually chronologically graded and hierarchically structured school system that is intended to provide particular types of learning to specific populations."[1]

In his review of the field, La Belle (1981) points out that scholars lack the most rudimentary information about the nonformal education of children

[1] La Belle's 1981 definition is adapted from Ahmed and Coombs (1974). Nonformal education is distinguished from formal education (the official school system) on the one hand and informal education (the process of learning from daily experience) on the other.

and youth, "things that we take for granted when we talk about school, like who are the actors, what is the scope of their relationship and on what does the nonformal education process focus." Without concrete descriptions of what, for example, children actually do in these settings, we cannot begin to understand their effects.

This paper describes a widespread American educational experience--Boy Scouts--that has curiously gone unexamined. In 1980, scouts enrolled over 2 million boys (about 20 percent of the 11 to 13 year old age group), and enrollment has been growing.[2] The Official Boy Scout Handbook has sold 29 million copies, a publishing record placing it in the ranks of the Gideon Bible and the World Almanac (Fussell, 1982). Scouting is part of American folklore, the butt of New Yorker cartoons and Tom Lehrer lyrics. The very term "Boy Scout" has passed into American slang.

Yet, educators have ignored this institution. As Fussell (1982) observes, "the right sort of people don't know much about" Boy Scouts:

> The right sort consists, of course, of liberal intellectuals. They have often gazed uneasily at the Boy Scout monument. After all, a general, the scourge of the Boers, invented it; Kipling admired it; the Hitlerjugend (and the Soviet Pioneers) aped it. If

[2] These figures come from the national office of Boy Scouts of America. We suspect the official statistics overestimate the number of active scouts. In the troops we studied, a third of officially registered boys did not attend meetings.

> its insistence that there is a God has not sufficed to alienate the enlightened, its khaki uniforms, lanyards, salutes, badges, and flag-worship have seemed to argue incipient militarism, if not outright fascism.

Those academics who have bothered to look at scouting at all have paid no serious attention to it as an educational institution. Mechling (1978, 1980, 1981), in a series of interesting articles, analyzes Boy Scout activities primarily in terms of male gender display. Hantover (1978) sees scouts as an institution which arose not in response to the educational needs of boys but in response to the psychological needs of men to validate their masculinity, threatened by the change from an agrarian to an urban society.

The academic literature fundamentally interprets scouts as a class-bound institution attempting to keep boys pure by isolating them from the adult world and occupying them with make-believe and trivia (Kett, 1977; Gillis, 1981; Hollingshead, 1975). (The scout leaders with whom we have discussed the academic view find it incomprehensible; it bears no resemblance to their reality.)

This study, to our knowledge, is the first that has examined in detail boys' actual day-to-day experience in the scout program. This paper has two parts. First, we describe the relationship between the family and scouting. We argue that certain types of families deliberately use scouts as an educational tool, as a way to reinforce family values and to carry out an educational agenda they have for their sons. What is crucial is not simply the scouting experience but the relationship between the family and the experience.

Second, we describe the education that occurs in the scout troop itself. We look at what boys learn from three key scouting experiences: camp-outs, troop meetings, and scout ceremonies. We argue that scouts demands its members perform a difficult set of tasks--such as running meetings, keeping a group together and getting a job done, and identifying and organizing a community service project. Finally, we explore the concept of the "tasks" demanded in a setting as a general framework for analyzing the effects of nonformal education.

Methods

Our view of scouting is based on an intensive study of boys' experience in two scout troops. Executive directors of the local Boy Scout Council recommended both to us as examples of well-functioning troops. During 1980-81, we observed the troops for fourteen months (seven months each). We took detailed field notes on 75 events--troop meetings, camp-outs, canoe races, flag ceremonies, Saturdays spent at a warehouse recycling papers, holidays spent riding around town in the back of a pick-up truck to put up American flags. After each event, we did an analysis of what skills were taught, what value messages were sent, what educational relationships occurred, and what roles youth held.

During the fieldwork, the first author (an educator) remained an analytic observer. The second author (an anthropologist) also became a participant observer, enrolling her eleven-year old son in the first troop we studied and then moving him to the second. On camp-outs, male research

associates did the fieldwork; a female would have been atypical and intrusive. (Women were not unusual at troop meetings and other scout events. In one troop, the scoutmaster's wife and several parents typically watched meetings from the sidelines--talking avidly about scouting, helping out, and cheering the boys on.)

Focal Boys

In addition to intensive observation, we repeatedly interviewed twenty "focal" boys and their parents. We selected boys in troop leadership roles, who had several years of scouting experience, and boys new to the troops, who noticed the commonplace.

The interviews focused on what the boys had learned from scouting, what kinds of new people they had met, and what experiences scouts offered that boys did not get elsewhere. In addition, the parents of fifteen boys kept diaries of their son's scouting activities and their son's comments and reactions to scouts. These diaries (and the monthly discussions with parents when we collected them) were an especially valuable supplement to the fieldwork.

Review by Informants

This paper was reviewed by scouting professionals, the scoutmasters of the two troops we studied, and parents interested in the research as well as by academic colleagues. While informants corrected factual errors, none disagreed with the central points. The executive director of the local Boy Scout Council wrote on the cover of his review copy, "a very Honest look at Scouting, Good and Bad."

Representativeness

Small-scale descriptive studies of this type offer the advantage of rich detail and concrete observation. An unresolvable issue, however, is how representative the situation is.

On the basis of interviews with scouting professionals about other troops, the troops we studied seem to represent common types. Both generally followed the national scouting program (although one placed much less emphasis on badgework and patrol organization than the other). Our troops, however, by no means represent the range of variation. We deliberately selected well-functioning troops because we wanted to see what boys learned from such a nonformal educational activity as Boy Scouts when it was going well.

In addition, our troops were located in Alaska in a community of 48,000 people. This setting created particular conditions. Camping was not as uncommon an experience as in cities; most of the boys' families camped. Survival skills--particularly at 50 degrees below zero—were more important. Scouting membership in this community, however, follows national patterns--high enrollments in the 1950s followed by a decline in the 1970s and a slight increase in the 1980s.

In short, we cannot say exactly how typical our troops may be. Adults reminiscing to us about scouting usually see their own troop as somewhat different from the ones we studied; their troop emphasized badges even less or camp-outs even more or were somehow unique. Troops have their own ethos. But there are also common patterns.

The Two Troops

The two troops we studied were sponsored by churches (Methodist and Presbyterian) and met one evening a week in the church basement. Apart from providing a meeting place and an occasional site for service projects, the church had little to do with the troops.

One of the troops (which we call the "University troop") met near the main campus of the state university. Its scoutmaster, a plump and jovial man, was head of the university's research proposal office. He had become active in scouting after his son entered the troop. He remained a scout leader, although his son (an Eagle Scout) was now in his twenties. The boys liked his good humor, although the point of his jokes was often their deficiencies.

Most parents in the University troops were professionals with high incomes; about half worked at the university. During 1980-81, the troop had 13 active members, and about half of these were 11 to 13 year old boys.

The other troop (which we call the "Downtown troop") met near the central business area. Its scoutmaster was a maintenance man for the state Department of Parks. He was demanding, tough, and aggressively masculine in both speech and demeanor. The boys respected him as an exceptionally skilled outdoorsman, who, as one boy said, "really thinks about the physical world." The boys explained to each other that his angry outbursts at their incompetence shouldn't be taken too seriously. He also no longer had a son in scouting, although his son (an Eagle Scout) came frequently to troop meetings and taught scout skills.

Boys in the Downtown troop came from a mix of working and middle-class families. The troop had 22 active members; almost three-fourths were 11 to 13 years old.

The scoutmasters and the boys in these troops fit a typical scouting profile (Survey Research Center, 1960). The scoutmasters, like those nationally, were married, the fathers of two or three children, and had sons who were or had been Boy Scouts. The boys were white and predominantly middle-class, although a sizable minority came from working class homes.

Both troops basically followed the national scouting program. Both scoutmasters saw the goals of scouting as teaching outdoor skills, developing leadership and character, and generally preparing boys for adult life. Both troops had patrols (although these were more organizational devices than functioning groups), boy leaders ("senior patrol leaders") who ran meetings, and parent groups (the "Troop Committee").

Boys spent large amounts of time in these troops in boy-led meetings and monthly camp-outs where they learned, for example, emergency rescue skills such as how to build a shelter out of branches and snow (see Table). In addition, each troop conducted flag ceremonies for civic groups and participated in council-wide events, such as Clean-Up America Day, Junior Leadership Camp, and Troop and Merit Badge Summer Camp.

In the Downtown troop, boys also spent a large proportion of their time in fund-raising activities--collecting and bundling newspapers for recycling (an activity which won the Governor's Conservation Award) and selling contracts to businessmen to put up and take down the American flag on national

TABLE

Time Spent in Boy Scout Troop Activities

TROOP EVENTS	UNIVERSITY TROOP[1]				DOWNTOWN TROOP[2]			
	No.	No. of Days	Total Hours	(% of Total Hours)	No.	No. of Days	Total Hours	(% of Total Hours)
Troop Meeting	28	28	42	(40)	26	26	52	(23)
Troop Campout	3	7	49	(47)	2	6	50	(23)
Troop Leaders' Council	2	2	3	(3)	3	3	5	(2)
Flag Ceremony	5	5	5	(5)	1	1	1	(.4)
Money-Making Events					14	14	86	(39)
Other	1	1	6	(15)	6	6	28	(13)
TOTAL	39	43	105	(100)	52	56	222	(100)
Council-Wide Events[3]	6	12	99		6	12	99	
TOTAL	45	55	204		58	68	321	
Average Time[4] Per Month			29				45	

[1]October-April.

[2]Late April to mid-July, September-December.

[3]These events represent a minimum of those available to scouts, representing those which were regularly attended by most scout troops in the area such as the camporees, Clean Up America Day, Scouterama, Junior Leadership Camp, and a Klondike Derby.

[4]This figure represents the time boys could spend on troop activities; not all scouts participated in all events.

holidays[3]. The University troop did not do such fundraising; parents preferred to donate money rather than get up at 5:00 a.m. on holidays and drive boys around to put up American flags.

For active scouts in these troops, scouting involved far more time than a two-hour weekly meeting and a two-week summer camp, the image of scouts in the academic literature (Hollingshead, 1975). A boy who participated in all available troop activities averaged 29 hours a month on scouts in the University troop and 45 hours a month (due to fundraising) in the Downtown troop (see Table). All troop members did not spend this much time in scouts. But for active scouts--particularly those who held major offices--scouting was not a casual activity.

The Family and Scouting

When we made our first telephone call to ask a mother if we could interview her about her sons' experiences in scouting, we were taken aback by her response. She very much wanted to talk to us. What she wanted to talk about was how much pressure she should put on her three sons to become Eagle

[3] While both troops followed the official Boy Scout program, each troop created different educational experiences for the boys who belonged. The key variable in explaining the differences between the University and Downtown troops was the ideology of the scoutmaster and other troop adults. The University troop emphasized having fun while the Downtown troop emphasized a work ethic. For a comparative perspective, see Shinkwin and Kleinfeld (1983).

Scouts (a family tradition carried on by her husband, his three brothers, and all male cousins). Her youngest son had not shown the drive necesary to complete the Eagle requirements; she worried about how much to push him.

The incident alerted us to the significance of the family in shaping boys' experience in scouting. In an important essay on the family as educator, Leichter (1979) points out that families not only educate their children inside the home; families also "mediate" outside influences. They help select the experiences their children have outside the family. They interpret, criticize, reinforce, and add to what goes on in these settings. To understand the influence of scouting, we realized, we needed to understand how families mediate the scouting experience.

Family Emphasis on Scouting

When we asked why our focal boys had joined scouting, both the parents and the boys described a casual process that gave little indication of how intensely many of these families supported scouting. Most of the boys said they had been Cub Scouts and had just continued on. A few told us that their friends had recruited them, that older brothers were scouts, or that their fathers had been scouts. The boys were aware that their parents were "for it," "kind of encouraged it," and "thought they'd get a lot out of it." But they viewed scouts as a "fun" activity and ignored the "values part."

Parents reversed these priorities. As one father explained:

> I left scouts in the eleventh grade. I came back and entered as an adult. Then your perspective changes. I

> realized what scouting was and what it accomplishes between campfires and activities. It doesn't matter a bit if kids learn how to use an axe properly. They may not have to use it at all when they're an adult. It's the values that matter.

In many scouting families, we found a high degree of religiosity and patriotism, intense emphasis on achievement and community responsibility, and strong feelings about good manners and other traditional values. Many of these parents felt that most contemporary institutions--including public schools--no longer supported such values. What Boy Scouts offered them was a setting outside the home where family values received support:

> Boy Scouts emphasizes what I want my kids to learn. I was raised by the same values. I've got to teach my values to my kids. The schools aren't doing any of it. Good manners learned at home are reinforced at Boy Scouts. They're certainly not reinforced at school.

We asked parents directly whether scouts emphasized the "same values as your family or whether there were some differences in what you as parents teach your son and what Boy Scouts teaches your son." Almost all parents (85 percent) stressed that "scouting has the same values as we have tried to give him." Many parents agreed so strongly that they answered the question before we could finish asking it. Their sons (95 percent) also saw their families

emphasizing the same values as scouts. "A lot of the same things the scoutmaster tells us, my parents say exactly the same thing," one scout sighed. "It's like they heard the same speech from someone."

Families used scouts not only to reinforce family values but also to accomplish other educational agendas they had for their sons. Some families wanted the program to sand off rough edges, to show their sons how to get along better with other boys. One mother wanted her son the "houseboy" to get some exercise. Several mothers raising boys alone wanted the scoutmaster to be a male influence. In one case, the mother had multiple sclerosis, was raising her son alone, and "had the guilties" about not being able to take him anywhere. In another, the mother was divorced and had two sons who were constant behavior problems in school. She used the scoutmaster as a surrogate father to talk to her boys and to intercede for them with school authorities.

In most families (80 percent), the father had been a Boy Scout. He had enjoyed scouts, learned a lot from it, and wanted his son to have the same experience. Scout stories were family lore:

> My husband and I were fishing in the middle of the lake. The wind was blowing and we couldn't get back. Later we learned it was a tornado. My husband was in Boy Scouts and knows a lot about how to do things in the woods. He got us back and built a fire under the boat to get me warm. He really did protect me.

As boys entered high school, many wanted to quit scouts--due to scorn from friends, the press of schoolwork, or preference for the wrestling team. Most scouting parents urged their sons to stay with the program. "I've kept pressure on him to get Eagle," one father acknowledged. "No one remembers the guy who almost made it."

Parents praised scouts to their sons and criticized its chief competitor, organized sports:

> When they get out of hockey, what have they learned--just to hit each other around. I haven't seen many merits in the youth athletic program as compared to scouting. Most of the community leaders at one time were scouts. The scouting program has taught them responsibility in the community.

We observed several parent versus boy battles over whether the boy should stay in scouting. Sometimes the boy talked the parents out of scouting. Sometimes the parents held firm.

Scouting Education in the Family

Boy Scout ideology stresses passage out of the protected world of the family and into the public world of adult men. Camping is the core scouting experience because it places boys on their own. "On a camp-out, they don't have parents around to tie their shoes," the Downtown scoutmaster said loudly and often. "They have to learn to take care of themselves."

A few scouting events (such as father-son canoe trips) were intended to strengthen fathers' bonds with their sons. Fathers and sons, however, related to each other on these trips as joint members of a male company. Fathers avoided singling out their sons.

According to both scoutmasters, parents were not supposed to teach merit badges. Boys were supposed to call up adults they didn't know—merit badge counselors--to teach them badge skills. "It's important for boys to meet adult men in the community and work with people who really know their subjects," one scoutmaster declared. "None of this mother stuff!"

Given the official ideology,[4] we were surprised at how much scouting education actually took place in the family setting, not the troop setting. Few boys telephoned merit badge counselors. Many parents taught badge skills. One mother, for example, spent six hours going over the merit badge pamphlet on first aid with her son--teaching him about frostbite, heatstroke, cramps, and so on. Scouting education sometimes drew in the extended family. One focal boy reported that his grandparents had used his summer visit to teach him his water skiing, nature, and swimming badges. "They made me do every requirement, even those that were out of date," he complained. "My grandparents are sticklers for the right way to do things."

We do not want to over-emphasize the role of the family as educator in the scout program. Some parents spent a great deal of time helping their sons

[4] Here we refer only to Boy Scouts. Cub Scouts officially stresses family involvement, and the family theme is even stronger in the new Tiger Cubs Program for seven year olds.

with badgework and others did not. The scout program did intensify many parents' educational roles, however, with their adolescent children. Scouts first of all provided a convenient curriculum—skill awards and merit badge activities. Second, scouts provided an incentive for parents to help their children--rank advancement. Parents did not enjoy seeing other people's sons obtain awards and advance in rank at the Court of Honor while their own son sat.

Parents "mediated" the scouting experience in many ways other than d me, Eagle is the ulut skills. They emphasized the value of the scout program. One mother, a university professor, told her son that she taught Boy Scout first aid techniques in her courses. A father told his boy the scout advancement program was important because it taught "the vital skill of learning how to set a goal and achieve it and how to organize your efforts and channel your energies."

Families also reinforced scouting ideology. When parents helped their boys memorize the scout oath and law, they often used the occasion to talk to them about the meaning of such abstract concepts as trustworthiness and loyalty and how these ideals were expressed in day to day conduct.

Parents deliberately strengthened their sons' social identities as scouts, their identification with scouts as a reference group. One boy, for example, complained that any time he forgot his hat, someone at home reminded him to "be prepared." When another boy lied to his father about his whereabouts before the scout meeting, his father asked, "How can you sit there in your scout uniform and lie to me?" He tried to get his son to repeat the scout law and told him that he was allowed to go to scouts because his parents believed in these values.

In pointing out that parents shaped their sons' view of scouts, it is important to add that scouts also shaped parents' view of their sons. One father pointed out that the boy he thought could do nothing but sit in front of a TV set was tough and resourceful when a canoe turned over and he and his son had to rescue other scouts. Another bragged how his son (the smallest boy on a 65-mile survival hike) came through "like a champ--the other boys called him the 'little engine that could.'"

Parents did more educationally, however, than reinforce the official scout program itself. The critical process was this: The scout program created difficult problems for young boys to solve. What do you do when you are senior patrol leader and your subordinates are undermining you? How do you get rid of a bad senior patrol leader but let him save face so he stays with the group? Should you accept nomination to patrol leader when your elevation will intensify factionalism? These problems have important adult analogues, and parents helped their sons understand and solve them. Our parent diaries record many occasions where parents helped their sons conceptualize these issues and figure out alternative ways to handle them.

One mother, for example, described a series of discussions with her son about his obligations to another boy because he was a fellow scout:

> Ever since Paul has been coming to the troop, my son Jake has muttered about him. Yesterday he was really on the subject. He is verbal but not verbal enough to really make a whole lot of sense on this abstract issue which is--how to deal with a very nice

> but boring and rather stupid person who follows you around and that you don't really enjoy but feel sorry for. Well, I phrased it something like that and told him I'd known people like that and had never known what to do—scouting has provided a context for this sort of discussion.

In short, scouts reinforced the role of parents as educators of their early adolescent sons. The program provided families with a concrete curriculum—merit badge activities. But, more than this, scouts created serious problems--how to motivate members of a group, deal with factionalism, resolve obligations of official roles with personal feelings--which parents helped their boys understand and deal with.

Scouting Education in the Troop Setting

Scouts placed boys in a variety of settings--formal meetings, flag ceremonies, awards ceremonies, sales talks with businessmen, boy get-togethers to plan a Haunted House or an obstacle course, camp-outs, afternoons in the scoutmaster's garage building a sled, mornings in the scoutmaster's truck putting up flags. Each setting taught certain skills, sent certain value messages, placed boys in certain kinds of roles, and created different types of tasks.

We point out the varied activities, roles, and relationships which occur in well-functioning scout troops. We lack space, however, to detail what was

educational about each of these situations. Rather, we describe three major educational events that reapeatedly occurred in both of the troops we studied. We draw upon our interviews and diaries, as well as observations, to speculate on what these events taught.

The Camp-Out: Learning to be Tough

Camping is the core experience of scouting. The camping context is viewed as ideal for teaching physical fitness (you backpack; you do not camp out of the back of a pick-up truck), self-reliance (your mother is not there to take care of you), teamwork (you cook in patrols), and being prepared (your feet get cold if you forget your boots and wear tennis shoes). The scoutmasters of both troops said camping was by far their most successful troop activity. "Camping is the big thing," one boy said. "I don't go in much for paperwork merit badges. I've been in the outdoors but in scouts you really learn how to enjoy it."

According to the Scoutmasters Handbook, a minimum of ten days and nights of camping is expected each year. The troops we observed did more—one camp-out or other outdoor activity each month. Both scoutmasters prided themselves on the number of days and nights their troops camped.

Camp-outs varied in focus. There were endurance hikes, exercises in erecting snow shelters, solo survival experiences, and summer merit badge camps ("factories" for rank advancement). On one theme camp-out, for example, scouts practiced emergency skills. Patrols had fifteen minutes to use a compass to find an imaginary city, figure out how to get a victim out of a house where gas had exploded, and treat him for shock.

Rather than describe such special camp-outs (where the skills taught were obvious), we will describe a more ordinary camping trip--the Council's annual Fall Camporee:

The church parking lot late Friday afternoon was filled with excited boys and hovering mothers, anxious about temperatures threatening to drop below zero. After a worried conversation with the scoutmaster, one mother left with her boy to get warmer gloves. She missed the departure, chased the truck down the highway (praying she would catch up), and finally found it, unloading her boy like a cannonball.

Arriving at the campsite, the boys (and two fathers) got their packs together and hiked to the camping area where they met other troops. The scoutmaster directed the boys to find a flat area for their tents, clear the area of snow (about one foot deep), and pitch their tents. New boys observed the experienced campers who showed them how to place tent stakes, erect fly sheets, cover packs with plastic sacks to protect them from the falling snow, and enter a tent without getting snow inside (clean off your boots and pants cuffs while kneeling just inside the tent).

An incident Friday evening set a theme for the remainder of the weekend. One boy didn't bring a plastic bag to cover his pack. When the scoutmaster asked him where it was the boy said, "My mother forgot to put it in." The other boys hooted. All

weekend, whenever a boy asked where something was, a scout would say in a high pitched voice, "My mother forgot to pack it."

As boys made camp, the scoutmaster yelled, cajoled, and ridiculed them like a tough veteran sergeant with a bunch of green recruits. Two boys, for example, set up a line to hang their packs which ran across the path that had been made in the snow to get firewood. "What are you guys doing?" shouted the scoutmaster. "Making a pack rack," answered the boys. "Well look at where you're making it," the scoutmaster yelled. "Right across the path. Now ain't that dumb. Put it off to the side between them there trees."

Older scouts often used the same ridiculing style in instructing less experienced boys. (These lessons, we suspect, were remembered.) New boys paid close attention and deferred to those scouts who were already skilled outdoorsmen.

Saturday morning the boys began to stir at about 7:00 a.m. The scoutmaster hollered from his tent that he wanted a fire built and coffee made for him. When the adults got up an hour later, each patrol was attempting to start a fire (only wet wood was around). The scoutmaster took charge of fire building for the patrol nearest the adult tent. Boys watched intently as he stripped off the wet outer bark, selected the most seasoned twigs, and blew on them until they caught fire. The other

patrols managed their fires and the boys had Tang, Poptarts, and instant oatmeal.

After a morning assembly at the end of the lake, the scouts rotated through eight merit badge learning stations. At five of these stations, older boys taught pioneering skills--how to coil and splice rope, make knots and hitches, and build a raft. The older boys demonstrated the technique, and younger scouts practiced. At two wildlife stations adults taught wildlife habits and game management techniques and values. The boys learned to use bow saws to cut down small charred trees, which they then cut into logs to be used at the council fire later that evening. At the last station a scoutmaster taught rescue breathing techniques while the boys practiced on a dummy.

Most of the boys made serious efforts to learn, although a few fooled around. After two hours, the boys were too cold, wet, and hungry to learn anything. The patrols built up their fires and cooked lunch (soup, beans, and hot dogs). Afterwards the boys went fishing and returned in the afternoon to the badge stations.

During dinner, the boys talked about the day's activities and about pranks and hardships during other camp-outs. They tried to top each other with tales of cold, hunger, and endurance. "I carried a pack of 40 pounds for eight miles." "Well, I carried a 30 pound pack up a mountain."

The boys monitored each other for signs of weakness and slacking. "Come on Ralph, go get some firewood," one scout yelled. "You just want to stay around the fire and keep warm. You're not the only one that's cold." The boys pointedly discussed the toughness of accompanying adults--who slept in his truck instead of a tent, who brought a pillow instead of making one by rolling up his clothes.

The temperature dropped to 15 degrees that evening. At the scout campfire, everyone was too cold to take much interest in a cobbler contest. The troops made feeble attempts to present skits and songs.

Sunday morning the patrols again tried to start a fire. Many scouts stood around in socks or tennis shoes because their boots had frozen during the night. Due to the cold, the mountain climb was cancelled. The scoutmaster was disappointed they could not make the climb. "I wanted to show these mini-wimps just how tough I am." He called the boys together and demonstrated how to take down and fold a tent. He then announced that he was going to inspect the campsites. "You should leave it looking like we were never here." The boys picked up bits of trash.

During the ride home, the boys talked about what a good time they had, their disappointment at the cancelled climb, and the various hardships. ("Gee, my socks really got wet"—"My feet were really cold.")

What did the boys learn from the Fall Camporee? The experience taught obvious outdoor competencies--how to erect, take down, and pack a tent, how to shoulder a pack, how to build and care for a fire in wet snow, how to dry wet gear and keep boots from freezing.

When we asked boys and their parents in our interviews just what the boys had learned from scouting, most emphasized these kinds of outdoor skills. It is important to recognize, however, the meaning these skills had to early adolescent boys. The point is not simply that scouts taught them how to pack a tent or build a fire. Scouts gave them confidence in facing situations they worried about. Boys felt they could handle being left alone after an airplane crash or being left alone during a hunting trip. "Ive learned enough from scouting so I wouldn't go crazy if I lost my Dad for a while on a hunting trip," one boy put it. (His underlying fears about his father's death are not difficult to discern.)

In the boys' view, what they learned in scouts was how to take care of themselves and to help out others. As an experienced scout expressed it:

> If I am flying a private plane and something went wrong, I could survive if I survived the crash. If I went out in the winter and the car broke down in the middle of nowhere, I would know what to do. In my old troop in New Mexico, I had to survive 36 hours in the desert with very little water. Now I could do this comfortably. If some dude fell in the water, I could save him.

In talking about what they learned in scouting, boys spun heroic survival and rescue fantasies. One talked about rescuing an injured girl after an automobile crash. Another savored a vision of being dismissed early from school to save the community from a nuclear attack.

While older scouts had this confidence, younger scouts admitted that they were frightened of many of the tasks scouts demanded they perform, such as camping out in the winter or splitting wood with an axe. Scouts provided a protected setting where boys learned they could do things they never thought they could. A twelve year old frankly described his gain in self-confidence:

> I used to be afraid a lot. Before I used to think that I can't do anything. At camping, I used to think I'm no good and I don't know why I joined. Then after about half a year, I beat out Charles at making a fire. The scoutmaster gave me one match and coached me a little. I made the fire with one match. I didn't believe it. After that I could almost all the time start a fire with one match.

Parents worried (with justification) about the dangers of such experiences as winter camping where temperatures could suddenly drop to forty degrees below zero. The downtown scoutmaster held firm; knowing how to handle such dangers was the point:

> Mama doesn't want to let go, especially in the winter. They are going to get cold. The time may come when there is not going to be any choice and they are better off if they know what to do.

Parents had confidence in scouts as an institution and permitted their sons to take risks in scouts which they wouldn't permit elsewhere.

Beyond learning specific outdoor skills, what Boy Scout camping was all about was learning to be tough. The Fall Camporee illustrates this--the bragging about hardships, the references to "wimps," the scorn for the father who brought a pillow. For boys who would just as soon watch cartoons on Saturday morning, the Fall Camporee was a test of manhood. Can you go through this miserable experience without complaining and without needing your mommy?

Learning to be tough was what distinguished camping in Boy Scouts from the boys' other camping experiences. Camping itself was not a new experience to most of the boys. All the boys' families camped. Almost every boy we interviewed (90 percent), however, emphasized family camping was different:

> It's harder to survive on a Boy Scout camp-out. You carry your own stuff and they expect you to carry a lot. Your parents think you can carry about half of what you can really carry.

Scouts sometimes taught outdoor skills boys learned elsewhere, but the same skill had a different meaning in the scout context. One of our focal boys, for example, said that he had learned skiing at home, at scouts, and in a community college course. At home, he skied for fun. In the course, he learned skiing techniques. In scouts, he learned whether he could make it on an eight mile ski trip with a pack on his back.

The Boy Scout camp-out can be interpreted as a classic puberty rite. It separates boys from their mothers, places them in an exclusively male transitional environment, teaches skills and lore specific to males, and tests fortitude and endurance (Fiske, 1979). Scouting's masculinity themes are obvious and have been extensively discussed in the academic literature (Hantover, 1978; Mechling, 1981).

What puzzled us was how little the boys and mothers we interviewed (but not the fathers) acknowledged these masculinity themes. When we asked if scouting had any effect in teaching boys "how a man behaves," boys' responses were ambiguous and mothers' defensive. Boys typically saw scouts as showing them how an "adult" behaves or showing them how different kinds of men behave.

Whatever the conscious or unconscious meaning of these masculinity themes, scout camping clearly communicated the importance of being tough and competent in the outdoors. What is interesting is not that scouts sent such messages--so do Marlboro ads. The point is that the scout context enabled boys to display toughness through altruistic behavior. When we asked our focal boys whether they had met any boys in scouts whom they especially admired, almost all mentioned experienced older scouts who were good in the outdoors and who

helped out younger scouts. One boy, for example, described an older boy who noticed a younger boy sagging on a camping trip. Without saying a word, the older boy lifted his pack off his back and hiked on carrying two packs. In the scout context, boys could express toughness this way.

The Troop Meeting: Learning How to Take Charge

What most surprised us when we attended our first scout meeting was that the person running it was a fifteen year old boy. The senior patrol leader conducted the meeting, organized teaching groups where experienced scouts taught scout skills, kept order, and ran the closing game. The scoutmaster watched from the back of the room, yelling at the boys occasionally to settle down. The scoutmaster did take over two or three times during the meeting, but all participants acknowledged that the boys were supposed to be in charge.

The University troop meetings were raucous affairs, characterized by a high noise level and a great deal of physical activity including pushing, shoving, wrestling, and a high level of joking:

> The scoutmaster announced that the troop would be conducting a Flag Ceremony at the opening of the University of Alaska/Hawaii basketball game. He needed five volunteers in full uniform.
>
> "Do we get a free pineapple?" one boy asked. Another began to pantomine flag carrying. First he swaggered with the flag. Then he switched into an imitation of a mentally retarded person trying to hold up a flag.

Another boy joined in. "These are windshield wipers," he yelled, doing a pantomine of a flag swaying rhythmically. Two other boys joined in. "Now speed up," one called. All three imitated windshield wipers speeding out of control.

Downtown troop meetings, in contrast, had the appearance of a board meeting in a large corporation. Boys sat quietly in patrols, gave serious attention to the subjects under discussion, and volunteered ideas and time. When the experienced scouts taught badge skills, they emphasized the seriousness of the subject:

A 13 year old scout sat on the floor with three younger scouts. He read off a requirement for the communication skill award:

Boy teacher: Make an emergency phone call. There is an emergency situation at home, what would you do?

Boys respond seriously: Dial 911.

Boy teacher: You must remember--WHO, WHERE, WHAT!

Boy teacher repeats: What are the three things you give on the phone?

Boys respond: Who, where, what.

Both the University and Downtown scoutmasters believed that learning to run troop meetings and organize projects developed "leadership ability." They frequently told the boys that the major leaders in the community had

once been Boy Scouts. Boys' personal experience confirmed the view that Scouts prepared them for prominence. After spending two days selling flag contracts to businessmen, for example, one boy remarked loudly to his friends at a troop meeting, "I met a lot of managers who were scouts like the manager of Woolworths was an Eagle Scout and the manager of Zales was a scout and a couple of the doctors were scouts."

An Eagle Scout recalled a Jamboree trip where he and his friends ate lunch in the U.S. Senate dining rooom and learned that the Vice-President of the United States was a Life Scout:

> We were in there eating and Hubert Humphrey—former vice-president—comes up. He asked us boys, "Are there any Life Scouts?" And there was one Life Scout. And he said that he was a Life Scout and to make sure you go ahead and get Eagle.

Boy Scouts provided an unusual occasion for young boys--12 and 13 year olds--to practice formal leadership roles. Most active scouts held these positions; unlike school, a boy did not have to be an athlete or a popular man-about-campus to hold office. In both troops, active scouts had about a 1 in 2 chance each year of holding some important role--patrol leader, scribe, trainer, assistant senior patrol leader. The University troop (unusually small), had 13 active members and 6 official positions. The Downtown troop had 22 active members (about the national average), but offered more leadership roles and more frequent changes of officers.

Most of the boys we interviewed (70 percent) had never held an office outside scouts. The few who had held a school office said that scouts gave them real responsibility; school leadership roles did not. "In school," a senior patrol leader said, "I was class president but that didn't matter much." In scouts, he explained, the troop depended on him. If he didn't plan good camp-outs or an interesting program, the troop would disintegrate. (His concern was realistic; the University troop almost disintegrated in midwinter when the senior patrol leader lost interest and did not prepare a program.) In school, the boys said, they never had real responsibility, just minor jobs like arranging a dance or organizing a showcase display. If a job was really important, a teacher would do it.

Through scout leadership roles, boys learned basic organizational skills--how to conduct a business meeting, work out an agenda, plan a monthly program of activities, conduct an election, appoint assistants and follow through to make sure they did their jobs. One mother emphasized that her son (troop scribe) was learning organizational skills at thirteen that she was now trying to learn in her thirties:

> When I was a child you just showed up (at youth group meetings) and had to be good and agreeable. Tom has responsibility. I hear him on the phone planning, getting organized, giving other kids pep talks, telling them what to wear and what to bring. That's something I'm having to learn now as an adult with the Association of University Women.

Boys who held troop leadership roles learned how to handle challenges to their authority from those below and above them. Boys continually charged them with bossiness, ineptitude, and shirking of obligations. ("You're supposed to be teaching us." "How come you weren't on the camp-out?") And scoutmasters publicly dressed them down when they didn't plan a program, wear their uniform, or came late.

Troop leaders also learned how to cope with public failure and humiliation. We observed a meeting, for example, where two prestigious teenage scouts came to the Downtown troop to conduct elections for Order of the Arrow (the scout honorary camping organization). The three candidates--the senior patrol leader and two other boys--stood tensely in front of the troop while the two members of Order of the Arrow read a list of questions about their conduct. ("Who in this troop is a friend to all? Who in this troop is cheerful when there is a tiresome job?") The senior patrol leader, a 12 year old, went on with the business of the meeting while the ballots were counted (two were to be elected). He continued on with the business of the meeting--even when he thought he was the only boy who had lost the election. On another occasion, we observed a senior patrol leader, 16 years old, handle with grace a special meeting called to discuss removing him from office for not planning a troop program. Toughness training was not confined to camp-outs.

The primary way boys learned how to behave in leadership roles was observing older boys in these positions. "You're a little scout and you see all those bigger scouts being patrol leader," one boy said. "You kind of look up to them, do it the way they did." The scout program had a formal junior leadership training program, and scoutmasters occasionally coached boys, for

example, telling them they were trying to do too much of the job themselves. In the main, however, boys learned by watching other boys, criticizing their performance, and trying to out-do them when it was their turn.

The boys we interviewed had closely observed how other boys handled leadership roles and could compare in detail the leadership styles of different boys in the troop. One articulate senior patrol leader took over an hour to explain to us his theory of leadership:

> Generally with senior patrolling, you have to be friends with everyone. You have to be friends with people to get them to do things. If a kid refuses to do things, I take him aside and tell him you have to hold up your end or the whole system falls apart.... Leadership is confidence. You have to be confident that you can do it. And you have to be positive about everything....

He described to us explicit strategies for dealing with typical problems--what to do when higher authorities disagreed (the scoutmaster and assistant scoutmaster) how to deal with conflict (fighting between boys), how to motivate group members (boys who wouldn't work on badges), how to help boys with personal problems that threatened the group (boys who were bed-wetters or who would only eat peanut butter sandwiches on camp-outs).

According to most parents we interviewed (88 percent), scouts stimulated their son's interest in leadership. It gave them an image of

themselves as people with the know-how to lead a meeting, head a group, or stage a public event. Some boys told us they applied what they learned in scouts to leadership roles elsewhere:

> Before I went into scouting I didn't know what to do. Now if I'm picked to lead at school, I know what to do. I run it like a patrol. I pick an assistant and then we all pitch in. When it's done, I congratulate each person, tell them they have done a good job.

The Eagle Ceremony: Developing a Sense of Commmunity Obligation

Becoming an Eagle Scout was the aspiration of virtually every boy we interviewed. Getting Eagle meant fulfilling your parents' ambitions, improving your chances to do well in the world, doing something tough, and getting respect. As one scout put it:

> To me, Eagle is the ultimate. There's a lot of family pressure. I'd be the only one in either family to be Eagle.... They'll hire you if you're an Eagle. One of my friends got an Eagle. He went into the Air Force and now is Squadron Commander. It's a symbol. If you walk up to Joe Doe and he knows you're an Eagle, it brings you respect.

By making Eagle a boy could prove to himself and the world that he was among the elect. He was one of the one percent of all scouts who made it to Eagle. The requirements were stringent. A boy had to earn at least 21 merit badges, have 16 months of troop leadership experience, and have carried out an independent community service project. Yet the boys felt that anyone who put out the effort (regardless of athletic ability or brainpower) could make it to Eagle.

Just as the hallmark of the doctorate is the dissertation, the hallmark of the Eagle rank is planning and carrying out a significant community service project. Advancing to lesser scout ranks also required service. One boy spent six hours washing the windows of a church, for example; another built a spruce box to hold the troop's merit badge pamphlets.

The Eagle service project, however, was different. First, it had to benefit the whole community, not just scouting. Second, the boy could not do it all by himself. He had to get others (usually boys in the troop) to work as volunteers. The Eagle service project is intended to be a demonstration of community leadership ability, much like a dissertation is intended to be a demonstration of scholarly ability.

In the troops we observed, Eagle projects were showpiece efforts. One boy prepared a road map for a volunteer fire department which detailed unnumbered houses, cabins, and trailers on dirt roads. Another repaired 24 church windows. Scoutmasters took pride in the number of Eagles their troop produced each year and the quality of their projects. The University troop scoutmaster was fond of recalling a past Eagle project—landscaping a corner intersection--which had taken over 200 hours of volunteer effort. Both boys

and scoutmasters scorned "paper Eagles"—boys who had rushed through their badges or whose service projects amounted to nothing more than temporary clean-up jobs.

Beyond completing the formal requirements of badges, troop leadership, and a service project, Eagle scouts were expected to have internalized a sense of obligation to the community. These expectations were evident at the Eagle Board of Review, fundamentally an oral examination where adults (primarily parents on the troop committee) evaluated prospective Eagle Scouts. The decision point in the Eagle Board of Review—the moment of adult consensus--occurred when the boy showed interest in the welfare of scouts or other community institutions:

Mr. A.: Will becoming an Eagle change you?

Eagle Candidate: You progress to become an Eagle.

Mr. A.: Is there an obligation on you when you are an Eagle?

Eagle Candidate: There's an obligation to the community. Scouting makes you aware of the community.

Like a wedding or a baptism, the Eagle ceremony itself was a formal occasion--engraved invitations, full scout uniform, business suits and dresses, and visiting relatives. The elaborate ceremony was intended to motivate younger scouts to work toward Eagle; our interviews with younger boys showed it had this effect. For all involved, the occasion celebrated and reaffirmed

traditional American values--civic responsibility, patriotism, religious belief, honor, leadership, even motherhood. We describe one such occasion:

> The meeting rooom at the public library was filled with scouts in uniform, their parents, scoutmasters and former scoutmasters with their wives and children, family friends, and relatives who had traveled to town expressly for the event. The Master of Ceremonies (an Eagle Scout from the troop now in his early twenties) introduced the proceedings with rhetorical flourishes, personal asides, and extravagant tributes to the scoutmasters and scouting.
>
> The program began with a procession of boys bearing flags--the troop flag, a flag for each scout rank, the state flag, the American flag, and flags from each country where the new Eagle Scouts had attended Jamborees. The audience rose for the Pledge of Allegiance and the invocation, given by the bishop.
>
> The Master of Ceremonies spoke with feeling about the difficulty of becoming an Eagle and how he himself would not have made it without the help of the three scoutmasters present. He introduced the two brothers becoming Eagle Scouts in a double ceremony. Both boys marched to the stage, escorted by their scoutmasters and a guard of Eagle Scouts. Lights were dimmed as a boy recited the Scout Law, lighting a white candle for each pledge.

A family friend rose to give the "Eagle Charge." He talked about the boys as "great honorable people, great citizens, great scouts." He recognized the contributions of each scoutmaster who had brought these boys to Eagle. He spoke of his own experience in scouting and his brother's and the effects of scouting in instilling in them the ideal of honor. He gave the new Eagle Scouts the charge to "be a leader and a leader for good causes," closing with a discourse on the obligations of an Eagle to his country and community.

The scoutmaster presented the Eagle awards to the boys. After receiving their own awards, the new Eagles placed smaller Eagle pins on their mother's dress. The scoutmasters read letters of certification from the President of the United States and the heads of the local and national Boy Scout councils.

The Master of Ceremonies announced that a mother's poem was always read at Eagle ceremonies, and it always "got to him." Three mothers, each of whom had a son who was an Eagle Scout, marched side by side to the edge of the stage and recited in ragged unison a poem about the growth of a boy toward Eagle. The poem ended with the lines:

Yes, it's only a pin, just an Eagle Scout badge
But the heart that's beneath it beats true
And will throb to the last for the things
which are good
A lesson for me...and for you.

The ceremony concluded with a reception--coffee and punch, and a white cake thickly decorated with Boy Scout symbols and the American flag. The new Eagle Scouts presented a slide show with shots of themselves, other boys, and scoutmasters on past camp-outs, hikes, and Jamborees. "These are the things of scouting," they said with emotion, "you don't forget."

One new scout asked his mother on the way home to buy him a camera so he could take pictures of the things of scouting.

The Eagle Ceremony celebrated more than the achievement of an individual boy. The basic theme of the event was social obligation--the obligations adult men had fulfilled to young boys and the obligations the boys would assume as adults to other boys and to the community.

Scouts increased young boys' contacts with men active in community work. The University troop scoutmaster announced at virtually every troop meeting that he was donating tents, a hunting knife, or other gear to the troop. At the annual youth canoe race, scouts observed men giving up their

Saturday to organize the race, provide radio communication, monitor safety, and set up hot chocolate and doughnut stands. At such occasions, boys heard people praising those who had helped out. ("Tom took off work today to come out. He's that kind of person.") Scouts, in short, surrounded young boys with people who took pride not in their career success but in what they did for the community. (One scouting informant uncharitably suggested that prestige in scouting substituted for prestige in careers.)

Scouting also created home situations where families celebrated community obligations--even where the parents did little service themselves. Parents, for example, talked to their sons about how much they admired the scoutmasters, who spent hundreds of hours on scouting, even though they no longer had sons in the troop. Parents pointed out that the scoutmaster was using half his annual vacation to take the boys on a canoe trip or that the scoutmaster was getting up at 5:00 a.m. every holiday to put up flags.

Scouts constantly created occasions where the boys were expected to help other people out. At troop meetings, the standard routine was for experienced scouts to help others learn skill awards and merit badges. The senior patrol leader was conscious of heavy obligations for the welfare of other boys. ("Got to make sure those wimps don't fall down a cliff.") Scouts put on bike safety rodeos for elementary school children, washed cars for the handicapped, and picked up trash on clean-up day.

Parents active in scouts cheered the boys on, bragged about what they did, and complimented each other on their fine sons. At one troop meeting, for example, a boy strutted in wearing full scout uniform. His mother announced that he was proud of himself because he had sold six flag contracts that

afternoon. A father commented, "I admire that. I'm not a good salesman." His mother added that he planned to sell ten more contracts after school tomorrow.

In emphasizing the community service dimension of scouting, we want to underline that service was fused to attaining status. Also neither the scouts nor the leaders we observed were paragons of virtue. One father told us he had let his boy drop out because older scouts threw iceballs at younger boys on an ice fishing trip. A mother was amazed to learn that her boy had been left behind by older boys on a ski expedition. A scouting adult joked about going out at midnight to cut down trees illegally for a camping trip.

But scouting did create a context where people censored such behavior. Scouts functioned as a reference group and boys were aware that proper conduct was expected. A patrol leader, for example, delivered the following speech about a Boy Scout party at the roller rink:

> We want to act as Boy Scouts. You should skate more than you play pinball. Even if we're not here in the church basement, we are still scouts so don't trip people.

In short, Boy Scouts created a context where community obligations were highlighted. Scouts surrounded young boys with adults and prestigious older boys who modeled social responsibility. Scouts provided incentives--rank advancement and social approval--for boys to engage in service activities.

Scouts created occasion after occasion where community-oriented conduct was demanded, expected, rewarded, and celebrated.

Within the scout context, Eagle brought a boy prestige. But it is important to recognize that the status a boy could gain from virtually any sport far exceeded the status he could gain from Eagle. The local newspaper, for example, printed a photograph of the "Youth Athlete of the Week" on the sports page along with a ten to twelve paragraph article detailing the youngster's fine character and accomplishments. The paper printed an Eagle announcement on the youth page without a photograph and disposed of the boy's community service project in a single sentence.

Conclusion

Nonformal educational agencies, such as Boy Scouts, 4-H, basketball teams and Little League, all claim to offer young people important developmental experiences. They all purport to develop character, good citizenship, leadership, physical fitness, the ability to work in a group, and so forth. How can we evaluate these competing claims? Are they all just rhetoric or do any of these activities accomplish such ends?

In an important analysis of high school students' experiences in a nonformal educational setting, a community-based learning program, Moore (1981) proposes a general framework for examining what young people learn in educational settings outside of school. Moore suggests that the key element is what "tasks" the nonformal situation demands. Education occurs when a person learns how to perform new tasks by making use of the particular information,

materials, and people available in the nonformal setting. What tasks are set and how these tasks get done in turn depends on the structure of the setting (such as the roles young people and adults hold), the organizational ethos (beliefs and value systems), and the kinds of people who occupy the setting (La Belle and White, 1982 following Moore, 1981).

What kinds of "tasks," then, does the Boy Scout setting demand of early adolescents? Compared to community-based school programs (Moore, 1981), the tasks in Boy Scouts are unusually concrete, well-defined, and sequenced in difficulty. The most obvious set of tasks is mastering practical competencies defined by badge and rank advancement requirements--first aid skills, emergency skills, outdoor skills. Men who were Boy Scouts have told us that they have had many uses for these skills as adults. It is helpful to know how to start a fire when the wood is wet or how to tie a knot that will hold a boat at the dock.

Learning how to do these tasks, we have pointed out, also had symbolic importance for early adolescents. Boys felt that they were not so helpless and vulnerable as they had secretly assumed. Mastering these tasks also nurtured a particular kind of hero fantasy. The boys we interviewed imagined not athletic triumphs but accidents and disasters where they behaved heroically.

The second set of tasks Boy Scouts demanded of its members was learning how to manage an organization--how to preside over a meeting, set up an agenda, delegate tasks, keep a group together, and get a job done. In the troops we observed, scoutmasters took "boy leadership" seriously. In some cases, they let boy leaders flounder until the boredom and bullying that resulted nearly destroyed the troop.

Boy Scouts is one of those rare settings where what a twelve or thirtten year old boy does really matters, where young boys routinely make successes or failures of significant activities. Scouts could allow boys this latitude precisely because the scout setting was of secondary importance. As the boys we interviewed were well aware, they could not hold important roles in school because the repercussions of failure were too serious.

The third set of tasks Boy Scouts set for its members was to perform progressively more difficult service activities. The initial tasks were minor and defined by others--helping a new scout memorize the scout law or picking up trash on clean-up day. But the culminating task--the Eagle service project--required the boy himself to define something he could do to benefit the community. The task required him to obtain money and materials, to persuade other people to volunteer, and to manage their efforts.

Boy Scouts, in short, sets significant tasks that are quite different from those schools require. Parents' hopes that scouting will teach organizational skills and solidify a service ethic are not without foundation. But scouts cannot develop these skills or communicate these values independently. The strength of the institution depends on the strength of the family's support for it and the degree to which the family supplements it.

The success of nonformal educational programs for children and youth, we suspect, depends even more than the success of formal schooling on the family. These institutions reinforce but do not redirect; they make good boys better.

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